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MEMOIR

OF

JOHN H. ALEXANDER, LL.D;

BY WILLIAM PINKNEY, D.D.

Corresponding Member of the Maryland Historical Society.

READ BEFORE THE

Maryland Historical Society,

On Thursday Evening, May 2, 1867.

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By John Murphy, Baltimore, 1867.

MEMOIR.

No one could feel more painfully than I do the embarrassment of the position, which I am called, by your too indulgent kindness, to occupy to-night; or more sincerely regret, that the duty had not devolved upon another, better qualified, by habits of thought and literary tastes and pursuits, to discharge it in a manner worthy of your deceased comrade and yourselves.

He was my friend, and for full forty years no shadow ever rested on the stream of our friendship. Not so much as a transient cloud crossed the horizon that bounded it. Fresh as the first dewy breath of the morning, that broke on its birth, was its peaceful close.

You know how difficult it is for friendship to rise above the weaknesses of our nature, and wield a pen with the strict and stern impartiality that historic truth demands. To delineate any character, that is at all worthy of delineation, is difficult — so difficult, that but few, who have added to the treasures of Literature in other respects, have succeeded in this, one of its most attractive and important departments. Hundreds can paint battles, draw the picturesque in nature, and color them exquisitely, while but few can give you discriminating and faithful portraitures of the men, who were the controlling genius of the scenes described. Plutarch holds the first place among the painters of men, and his magnificent cartoons will live, as long as the world appreciates the grandeur and glory of the chief actors in its history; and it is really marvellous, how he contrived

511693

to rise above the force of individual and national prejudice, and preserve a strict impartiality in the parallel characters he described. Who then of us can fail to shrink from the attempt to tread a field of literary adventure, so difficult to cultivate and till?

If this be true of the delineation of character generally, how much truer is it of the delineation of such a character as Professor ALEXANDER'S? The truth in his life is more wonderful than fable; and the mere recital of the facts that made it so memorable has so much the air of romance, that to those who knew not the deceased, it may appear to be either the blind adulation of weak friendship, or the coloring of an overwrought and dreamy imagination.

Criticism has been levelled against biographers or sketchers of character with all the venom of its nature; and while it is true, that much of what is called biography is a fair subject of scathing rebuke, on the ground of excessive eulogy, it is not true that panegyric is reprehensible, or inadmissible, in the etching of the lights and shades of character. It is as often the case, that criticism itself is wanting in just discrimination, and as prone to accept the vagaries of its own fancy for fact, as it is, that eulogy is occasionally found to overstep the boundaries of truth. To be justly worthy of censure, the panegyric must be excessive. I do not profess to be above the weaknesses of our common nature. But I do desire to be truthful. I shall not complain, if I am only judged by my facts, in the estimate I have formed of the deceased. If what I shall say in praise of him be true, and you find, upon reflection, that it is only praise merited, you will not, I am sure, condemn, but rather applaud me for my truth.

To overdraw the picture would be a wrong to biography, a wanton sacrifice of that which constitutes its greatest charm, viz.: stern impartiality. But to conceal the really attractive features of the picture for fear of giving edge to criticism, and exposing oneself to the flippant charge of excess of admiration, is a not less grievous wrong to the character we are required to draw, and not less subversive of the great end that biography has to serve, the rescuing from oblivion the past, which illuminates and foreshadows the present. To attribute qualities to men, which they do not possess, is an insult to the intelligence of the living, and a weakness to the memory of the dead; while to overlook them, or, for the sake of escaping from the scalpel of a ruthless critic, to permit them to pass unnoticed is to insult the dead, and is by far too costly an offering to be laid on the altar of prejudice. The Scylla and Charybdis are before us; and all the skill of the navigator is needed to steer us safely between them. It will be my duty then to see to it, that I give you no occasion to use the scalpel; and yours, that you do not arraign me for my truth, or censure me for the manly assertion of all that is due to my facts.

Forty odd years ago, on the banks of the Severn, the waters of which have become well nigh classic to Maryland, where still echo the tones of a lofty eloquence and unsurpassed legal logic — I met, in close companionship, a youth then in the very bud of his being. He was not the child of fortune. The cradle in which he was rocked, was made of sterner stuff; and the winds that blew over it, were not summer zephyrs. Like most of the great men of the world, his wealth in the start consisted of a brave heart and strong will. At that early age, he was tall and slen-

der, extremely diffident, rather awkward, and retiring; and yet he possessed all the constituents, which, when developed, make a graceful, imposing, and finely-formed man. His childhood was carefully trained by a mother of the most remarkable beauty and strength of character — the impersonation of all that was lovely and winning in mind and heart — a lady of rare vigor of intellect, and the most refined sensibilities. She watched the budding of this, the youngest flower in the garden of her home, with more than ordinary vigilance; and early impressed him with the dignity of the true faith, and the value of a careful husbanding of his resources. I dwell upon this, because it is only another evidence of the great truth, that a mother has after all more to do with the moulding of the man in the boy, than all beside.

We were advanced to the senior class at college, and there began our most intimate friendship — he at thirteen, I at fifteen. From the start, the contest for the first honor was keen and well sustained. And while that class, between the members of which there never was so much as a jar of ill feeling, divided the first honor on the united judgment of the board and the faculty; we all of us felt, that for thoroughness of scholarship, he was beyond comparison the Achilles of the struggle. At the early age of fourteen, he took his degree; and for steady industry, systematic habits, and striking genius, he was as remarkable as in after years.

We passed out of the college halls together, and entered a law office. For four years, we read, and walked, and talked together; and then began his careful examination of history, and the great principles of the Law, as expounded by its masters. Nothing escaped him, that a youth of his years could compre-

hend. It is my firm conviction, that had he continued at the bar, he would have soon reached the first ranks of his profession. For although he possessed not the gift of oratory, and would probably not have made a brilliant pleader; he had those peculiar powers, clearness of statement, skill of analysis, concentration and amplification, earnest gravity and wonderful fluency, which would have commanded the respect of courts, and the confidence of juries. He was rich in resources, adroit in argument, ready in retort, and sparkling with wit. No man, who ever encountered him in one of those off hand debates that spring up in private conversation, could fail to discover, that it was necessary to call up his reserves, and keep the column of his ideas in line. He possessed singular self-control, and never allowed passion to obscure his reason, or excitement to throw him off his guard. His mind was eminently legal. He blended depth with pleasantry, philosophy with practicalness. If he had pursued the practice, he would have been of that class of lawyers, who delighted, not in the dry letter, but the hidden spirit, and his illustrations would have been drawn from all sources. He felt the grandeur of the profession. Weighing each step in argument and appeal, and possessing the most astonishing fluency, and that too a fluency of the most classic elegance and correctness, he could not have failed to reach the highest place among advocates. I have never met a man, who reasoned with more power and originality on any subject, which he thought fit to discuss. But he did not prosecute the law; and we are therefore estopped from assigning him a place in the list of advocates—all that we can do, is to argue from the clearness and rapidity of his conceptions, the strength of his memory, his collectedness, masculine common sense, and unflagging

industry, qualities we know he possessed. We regret, that he abandoned the profession, and we regret it, because his mode of argumentation would have been so original, and his quiet and beautiful command of language would have given to the bar a style of forensic pleading altogether as unique — as imposing as it would have been novel.

Professor Alexander chose the path of science and literature, and he chose it with the deliberation, that characterized all he did; and on that arena, he won his deathless fame. His first essay was the construction of a map of his native State; and his explorations were marked with the patience and accuracy, that were necessary to complete success. The end was not secured, for though the map was finished, it was not printed, for want of funds, the result of the State's want of enterprise; and it is certainly very curious, that in the two great departments of science and literature, the State faltered, when she should have ventured something, and thus lost the map and the history of her past glory, while her most gifted son of science, Dr. Alexander, and her most eloquent orator and one of her ablest writers, McMahon, were permitted to turn aside to other more remunerative sources of study and active employment. From that day to the close of life, our lamented brother devoted himself to scientific and literary pursuits; at times making a thousand dollar fee, for some opinion on science.

He was a profound mathematician, a poet, a ripe and varied scholar, a laborious and successful writer, and a punctual man of business. He was all this, or I have not read his character aright.

Perhaps his genius for Mathematics was his most masterful power. It would take a mathematician to sketch his character in this particular. If Professor

Bache, whose death he so deplored, who was himself at the head of this branch of learning, a man of the most enlarged views and the most liberal feelings, as much above the narrowness, that so often bounds the vision of the votaries of science — I repeat, if Professor Bache were now alive, he could tell you, how profound Dr. Alexander was in that particular department. His skill and extraordinary accuracy were often tested in the Coast Survey; and much of the fruit of his explorations was stored up in that treasure house of science. What was abstruse he mastered, and what was complex he simplified; so that he could readily solve the most difficult problem, and by the beauty of his method, and the richness of his genius, he could and did devise systems of calculation, that saved hours of labor, and never at the sacrifice of accuracy. I doubt whether any man in this country possessed greater profundity, united to equal accuracy of detail.

As a scholar, it is with more capability of appreciation I can speak of him. A Hebraist, deeply versed in Greek and Latin, as deeply skilled in modern tongues, he was without question the first linguist of this hemisphere. He wrote Latin as readily as he wrote English, with the same beautiful command of words, and skill in construction. When going abroad, he prepared his passports in seven different languages, and for penmanship and attic purity, they were splendid specimens, worthy of the most accomplished masters in either. It was really wonderful to see with what facility he could dash off, at a sitting, Latin verse, as fluently, as though it were his native tongue, and he a poet of the fair Italian clime. He was as exact as he was varied in his gift of tongues. He understood the rules of grammar, the principles of construction, the philology of words; and consequently

he was never betrayed into an error of either interpretation or construction. He had studied Latin and Greek in the school of the ancients, and had mastered the great principles that underlie them. From that stand-point, he had pursued the study of the modern languages. There have been and now are in this country, men skilled in all tongues; but I doubt, whether any one of them had attained his completeness of scholarship. He was trained by a teacher from the Emerald Isle, in the system of grammatical accuracy; and the superstructure he reared was based on the same deep and broad foundation.

His Dictionary of English surnames, in twelve volumes, is now ready for the publishers. It is a stupendous monument of learning, is thoroughly exhaustive of the subject of which it treats, and bears the impress of a strong and original genius. A volume of it was left with a publisher in London, and passed under the inspection of the scholars of Oxford and Cambridge, and was deemed to be by them so complete and satisfactory, that they expressed a desire to incorporate it into a work of their own. Nothing less than a patient and careful examination of it can give any, the least idea, of its magnitude and importance, and that I have neither the time nor the learning to make. When published, as I trust it will be, it will speak for itself more eloquently, than the tongue or the pen of the ablest and most discriminating of his friends could possibly do. His Concordance of the Prayer Book is also finished. The larger work, the Dictionary of that wonderful compilation, was unhappily left unfinished. The Suspiria Sanctorum, sonnets for the Holy Days, is ready for publication. It is illustrated by drawings, copied from the masters, the work of his own pencil, which are executed with remarkable taste and spirit.

As it stands, it is a specimen of penmanship, as beautiful as eye ever rested on, and breathes the same richness of poetic imagery, and gracefulness of expression, that characterizes his lyrics.

He turned his attention to the tongue of the Delaware tribe, which was extensively in use among the other tribes of this country. He began by taking up a word here and there, and then a sentence, and with something of the same sort of patient enthusiasm, that characterizes the anatomist, who seeks to put together the disarranged bones of a system not yet understood, he would articulate one sentence into another, until, with the aid of other helps, he reduced to order what was a misshapen mass, and recovered much, that was lost in the dialect of that extraordinary people.

If the gift of language had been his only pursuit, it is scarcely possible to conceive of greater proficiency than he had attained. I have known him to be tested in the most difficult passages, and always found him as ready and accurate, as promptness and accuracy could be. It was his amusement to turn English verse into Latin, and vice versa; and some really exquisite gems have passed under my eye, which were struck off in a moment, extemporized in the most appropriate words and musical rhythm. On a disputed passage either of construction or grammar, his opinion would have been the safest guide. For he was always backed by the rules of grammar, and the idiom of the language, and could not therefore well go amiss.

In that versatility of genius, which marked the character of Professor Alexander, we find that the embryo lawyer, the profound mathematician, was in like manner the ripest of scholars, and most thorough of linguists.

He was also a poet. I do not say a popular poet, for there was too much depth and originality of thought and expression to secure at once the popular applause — too much purity and beauty of language, and calm quiet depth of sentiment, to win its way to the popular heart, save by slow steps. He was however a true poet. His Introïts and Catena are both works of a high order. I select the latter, because it has just appeared in a new edition. It is curious to see, how he constantly sought after perfection, and elaborated what he undertook to the last degree of polish. The revised edition of this little work exhibits this habit of his mind, in its most winning aspect. Words are substituted, and lines altered, with a richness of resources, that seems to know no exhaustion. It is a string of pearls, not inappropriately called a Catena, which will link his name to an immortality, in that serene region, where the sacred muse most delights to dwell, and where she weaves her freshest and most beautiful garlands. The opening piece, the Prelude, and the closing piece, the Valete, are conceived in his richest vein, and marked throughout with that pathos and depth of feeling, which go direct to the heart. They are exuberant in thought, musical in rhythm, profound in sentiment, and full of heart-revealing. They are gems of their kind, "apples of silver in pictures of gold." The ideas in the second and third stanzas are exquisite.

> "The pictures blurred and canvass torn
> Of deeds mine own and others,"

with

> "the funeral march of figures tremulent"

are splendid specimens of word painting. "The luminous chain, which o'erhung, in its span, the azure

canopy" is grandly descriptive of the church's seasons, conceived and expressed in the happiest vein of the sacred muse. The lyric for Easter day, (to take the one nearest to us in point of time,) is a gem. The winter time of Christmas, and its snow white robe so bridal, and so sweetly typical of the coming of the Bridegroom, contrast beautifully with the vernal day of Easter, and is admirably sustained throughout. There is the true poetic ring in the stanza,

> "Therefore each rolling year,
> The withered leaves and sere,
> That icy Christmas scatters crisped and torn,
> Wanderers till Easter comes,
> When in their ancient homes,
> And on old forest boughs, they find themselves new-born."

I will not cull out of the Catena the links, that please me most. But I confidently believe, that the day is not distant, when it will be conceded, that the whole chain is of wrought gold, gold of thought, and gold of feeling.

It is a book of poetry, which, to be appreciated, must be studied. That which prevents the immediate popularity of a poem, may tend to secure for it a deathless immortality. Wordsworth "was formerly an object of neglect or derision;" but now to use the language of Coleridge, "he wears the crown, and will continue to wear it, while English is English." Dr. Alexander's poetry is not obscure. It is deep. But depth is clear. It is not however always seen through; for there may be a film on the eye of the reader. It is suggestive. This is perhaps its principle charm. As much is implied, as is expressed; and this, in poetry as in painting, is the perfection of art.

It is somewhat curious to see, how variously poetry has been defined by different writers of acknowledged ability and unquestioned literary taste. I am of the

opinion of Coleridge, that Milton has come nearer to the true conception, than any other writer. "Simple, sensuous, impassioned." Coleridge's own definition is not without merit: "The most proper words in the most proper place." Ruskin has written with his usual brilliancy; and so has Christopher North in the Noctes Ambrosianæ. They substantially concur with Milton. Judged by this test, and no other is a fair criterion of excellence; the Catena is a gem, richly set in a frame-work of gold. It is simple, sensuous, impassioned. Perhaps of these three elements, Professor Alexander was more deficient in the last. At least it was less strikingly developed in his mental organization. He lacks fire, the enthusiasm of inspiration, the fiery frenzy, of which Shakespeare speaks.

Dr. Alexander's poetry is peculiar, of a genus altogether unique, as distinctly marked, as was his genius. It is original in the modes of expression and illustrations. Its chief excellence consists in rich imagery, felicitous language, pure taste, and moral elevation. It has more light than heat, though it is not wanting in warmth. The Church Journal, which is one of our most intellectual and discriminating periodicals, writing of this volume, years ago, says, that each piece is possessed of rare jewels, but complains that there is evidence of haste and carelessness. I am satisfied, that what is imputed to haste or carelessness is attributable to Dr. Alexander's peculiarity of thought, and modes of expression. Careless he never was. Faulty at times he may have been, but not careless. I am of the opinion that if he had, like the troubadours of old, recited his poems, they would have been more popular; for his style suited exactly his vocal powers. He neither talked nor wrote like other men.

As a proof of the correctness of this opinion, the new edition just issued has comparatively few alterations; and where it is altered, it is not always improved — as, for instance, Hesper, for twilight, in the opening piece.

The editor of the Journal affirms, that Dr. Alexander is a bold man, because he wrote on the Church's seasons, and followed Keble. Now, I am not so well satisfied that there is much of boldness in this, heretical as it may sound. Heber had walked the same path before Keble, and Heber was a true poet. Keble followed, and in his own line it would have been not only presumptuous but foolish to have sought to follow him. This Dr. Alexander did not do. Both of them drew from the Scripture woven into the service for the day; and yet they drew from different portions of the Word, while neither of them have brought out the teachings of the seasons, as fully as they are brought out in prose. Keble is unapproachable in his own peculiar vein. He is a peculiar star, by himself, with no other star near him in that part of the heavens, which was the highest, where he now sheds the soft beams of his glory — a fixed star of the first magnitude, in the poetic constellation. But Dr. Alexander's was a totally different vein; and no microscope within my reach is strong enough to detect the least resemblance. They cannot be compared, for they are not alike. He must be dead to poetry, who does not trace with delight the footprints of either, and rejoice that the Church's system is so rich and suggestive, as to afford a secure foothold for both. Take the Easter or Trinity lyrics, and compare them; and they will be found to be as much unlike as two leaves, each resplendent in beauty, and a flowering of its own. To my mind, it would be about as wise to reject the

Japonica because it was not a rose, or deny the privilege of growth to two leaves, because, though totally unlike in form, they were both leaves, as to reject the lyrics of Alexander because they were the products of the seasons, which Keble immortalized. Keble walked in the footprints of Heber, and yet he sustained throughout his own peculiarity of genius; and surely another may step into his, if he has only the power to breathe over it his own rich genius, and preserve his own individuality. This Dr. Alexander did. He was no copyist of Keble, as Keble was no copyist of Heber. No man loves Keble or his genius more than I do. But still the path is open; and of one who has strowed it with the flowers of true poetry, as Dr. Alexander has done, I cannot breathe one word of censure, or think him either bold or presumptuous.

There is nothing, on which criticism is more disposed to issue its flippant decrees, than poetry, music, and painting — and yet there is nothing, which so calls for the exercise of its noblest powers, and keenest discrimination. I respect criticism, and pay all deference to its learned decisions; but I have no patience with that pretentious usurper, who is constantly seating himself in the seat of judgment, and in stupid ignorance of what in reality constitutes the subtle essence of true poetry, and destitution of the imagination, which is needful to its just appreciation, decries what he does not chance to relish.

My learned friend, writing to me a short time before his death, accepts the popular standard of merit, the pay it returns; and modestly waved the claim to the award that will undoubtedly yet crown his noble essay in this most difficult branch of the poetic art. But I do not. Fidelity to the churchly teaching, and the Scripture, woven into the service of the day, hampers

genius, and makes a work, like the Catena, doubly difficult. I have no fears of the ultimate judgment which will be passed upon the work. All that I dread is the indisposition to dig deep into the mines of thought — the too fatal propensity to regard poetry solely as the vehicle of pleasure, a pleasure obtained without effort, and not as it is the vehicle of instruction united to pleasure, the pleasure that flows from rich thoughts richly expressed, to the mind and heart, that spring to their work, and are patient in spirit.

Now, is it not wonderful that a mind so wedded to the exact sciences, and so deeply versed in their hidden mysteries, should at the same time have found a wing so strong to soar in the regions of poesy, and have been so well sustained in his flight? A mathematician, bold, original, profound, and a poet who had at command the most proper word for the most proper place, blended in one, and so blended, that the depth in either was as clear as the stream that wells up from some huge rock, on the bosom of which there is not so much as a single ripple. May it not be, as Wilson expresses it, "that poetry and science are identical."

To cap the climax, Professor Alexander was almost, if not quite, as deeply read in theology and Church history as he was in mathematics and general literature. It is not common for a layman to push his inquiries into this region of thought; nor is it common for him to succeed, if he does. But there was nothing common in the mental calibre of our deceased friend. He prepared and published a tabular statement of the points of doctrine, in which the several systems of religious belief meet and diverge; and I hazard nothing in saying, that this remarkable exhibition of the powers of condensation and accurate discrimination would have been worthy of any Prelate

in Christendom. On one occasion, meeting a distinguished and most learned divine of the Lutheran faith, who did not know him, he asked for information touching some point of belief, when the gentleman replied, I know not where you will find an answer, unless it be in a sheet published by some Dr. Alexander, of Baltimore, which is the most wonderful paper that has ever met my eye. On one occasion, he submitted to me a sermon, which he had composed merely to see how he could manage it; and for beauty of order, purity of language, copiousness of thought, and elevation of sentiment, it was a noble production — strikingly original, and yet thoroughly churchly in its tone. He was, perhaps, the best canonist of his day. The history of the Prayer Book was understood by him as perfectly as by any other man of his age. The Concordance is proof of this assertion.

There is a popular impression, which many men of science have endorsed, that such limitless range of study engenders superficiality, which is ranging every where, but never sounding the depths of anything — and perhaps this impression is in the main well founded. For rare genius is the rarest of all God's creations. But each case must stand on its own merits. There is no Procrustes bed, on which you can stretch genius, so as to make it suit your preconceived theories. Superficiality must be submitted to the actual test of experiment. It is not, and never can be, the result of theory. The diffusion of mental forces may weaken the vigor of some; but it would be a very illogical inference to conclude, that it would be productive of a like result in all. Dr. Alexander attempted many things — but the peculiarity of his genius consisted in this, that he never attempted,

what he did not execute thoroughly. He united amplification and condensation to such a degree, that he could call in his forces, and concentrate them at will; and the base of his operations was always so wisely chosen, that he could bring them to bear in a given point, whenever the emergency required. Those, who thought he unwisely extended the range of his inquiries, and because they were men of one idea, fancied that all men were like them, did not understand the man. He had a department in his brain for each topic he pursued, and had so systematized his plans, that he could either put you in possession of all that was profound in either, or else give you the authority, that was essential to its completeness. I dwell upon this, because it is possible, that some of the learned men of our day may have supposed, that want of thoroughness must have been the characteristic of a mind so boundless in its excursions. Superficiality was a thing he detested; and I am here to-night to vindicate his character in this respect. If superficial, show in what he was; or else, for decency's sake, forbear to immolate him on a theory, which, however it may hold true in ordinary cases, is utterly false as the measurement of extraordinary genius.

The admirable Crichton, the great Scotchman, graduated at twelve, was master of arts at fourteen, spoke and wrote ten different languages, was familiar with science in all its departments, and died at twenty-three. Perhaps he was the nearest approach to our lamented friend, of whom there is any record made.

Professor Alexander was skilled in the art of letter-writing. His penmanship was beautiful. If the letter was on business, it was so clear and lucid in order, and so rich in detail, that nothing was left to be desired; and then there was always some delicate

sentiment introduced to relieve it of the dulness, that would otherwise attach to a mere business transaction. If it was a letter of friendship, why then you might look for the rarest treat; words chosen with the most beautiful appropriateness, and ideas at once the most original and striking, playful or grave, humorous or sarcastic, descriptive or argumentative, as the occasion required. I think some of the finest criticisms I have read have come to me, in the freedom of friendship, in the form of letters, written on the spur of the moment. If those letters could be gathered up, they would constitute a book of the most bewitching character. There was nothing artistic about them; and yet they were characterized by all the best rules of art, well nigh perfect in their kind. They were the etchings of a master—speaking pictures—each picture in its place, and yet there was no evidence of constraint in the gallery. Here again we see that wonderful combination. Many can write, and write beautifully, letters of sentiment, who cannot write letters of business. It was said of Addison, that his greatest difficulty was just here. How to express himself on business, simply and to the point, was the problem. Professor Alexander could do the one as well and as easily as the other; and the business part over, he would insert some gem of sentiment that would set off the whole previous dry detail to the greatest advantage.

A distinguished friend of his, with whom he was spending a few days, told me, that one morning he took up a little book of Latin hymns, and in a few hours wrote a translation, in verse, of the Stabat Mater, that was not translated, and inserted the leaves so beautifully, that they looked as though they had been bound up in the volume. Passing out with him for a walk, they came to a brick-yard, when this

friend drew attention to the fact, that they could not make bricks in Connecticut. Professor Alexander immediately explained the cause, and when he was asked, how he came to know so much about it, he said, that he had entered a brick-yard in Baltimore, and worked a month at the trade, until he had thoroughly acquired the art. Here we have the embryo lawyer, the profound mathematician, the erudite scholar, the accomplished theologian, the writer of works exhaustive of the subjects on which he wrote, and the poet—a maker of bricks in the brick-yards of Baltimore, that he might be practically acquainted with the subject.

Perhaps you may say, that all this looks wondrously like the fables of some dreamer; and despite of my protestations of seeking to describe truthfully the character you gave me as my theme, you may be tempted to charge me with extravagant panegyric. But I ask, that the man, among you, who is incredulous, disprove my facts, or else grant with me, that the truth is frequently far more wonderful than fable. I do not hesitate, here in the presence of the most learned of this fraternity, to express my firm belief, that at the time of his death, a superior intellect was not embodied in this country.

He possessed every quality of mind that constitutes true mental greatness—judgment, memory, imagination, quickness of comprehension, an industry that never flagged, and a system that nothing disturbed. His memory retained all it touched. To consult him on any question was to be satisfied without the necessity to look for authority. It was already at hand. He was the most rapid reader. The operations of his mind were almost intuitive. I was often in earlier years, and occasionally in later, accustomed to study

with him; and I know by experience, how he resembled the lightning flash in conception and discrimination, and with all this rapidity, there was not the slightest sacrifice of accuracy. Nor am I alone in this opinion. A learned Prelate of our church once said to me, that Dr. Alexander was the most accurately learned man he had ever met — and he was competent to judge.

What is as strange, his humility was the most prominent characteristic of his life. He was the most modest learned man I ever saw. While he freely communicated knowledge, it was necessary to draw it out. He volunteered nothing. Respectful of, and attentive to the views of others, he maintained his own with a quiet dignity and unpretending firmness, that are above all praise. It was beautiful to see such humility; for we seem to have well nigh lost that cardinal grace altogether. Other ages may have been golden — ours is brazen, and by a strange sort of legerdemain we have contrived to make the mint issue a currency of brass, that is rapidly taking the place of gold; and are acting, as though we believed, that to assume to be, is to be.

What shall I say of Dr. Alexander as a man? Faultless I will not proclaim him; for faultless nothing human is. But if I were asked to tell you his faults, I confess to you, in all candor, that I should find it as difficult, as I have done to delineate his intellectual character without seeming extravagance, unbecoming me and the spot, on which I stand. A little too fond he was of disputation; the proneness, in the circle of his intimate friends, to argue for argument's sake, on any side of any question, to draw out the powers of an advocate. A little too undemonstrative he was. A little too much

absorbed in business. A little too speculative on those nice questions, which a wise man shuns as the secret things that belong to God. A little too distant and reserved. A little given to superstition, and not altogether free from prejudice. Where he felt, he felt deeply; and on one subject, on which we differed *toto cœlo*, the only question on which we differed, he may have indulged a little too much of a hardness, which was foreign to his nature, although I never saw it in the closest intercourse we ever held, and the most unreserved discussions, in which we freely indulged. But this said, all is said, that can be truthfully said of his failings.

I knew him in his boyhood and manhood; from the day when we dreamed dreams together, and builded those castles in the air that were all so gorgeous in their bubble existence, to the day of his death. In all that period of time, we were placed in the closest possible contact with each other, with no concealment on any subject, and scarcely a divided sentiment. In boyhood and manhood, he was high toned, just, exact, sincere, honest and accommodating. A more moral boy never breathed — a truer boy, or one freer from the taint of meanness, I never knew. This testimony, borne here on the spot where his manhood was developed, is but sheer justice to his memory.

What he was in maturer years, you knew as well as I did. Refined in his manners, a gentleman in the true sense of the word, he seemed to me to be governed in his intercourse with others by that considerate thoughtfulness and steady adherence to principle, which commands the respect it pays. Systematic in his business engagements, and scrupulously exact, his word was his bond. At the council board, in the committee room, he was punctual to the hour; and when

there, he addressed himself to the business on hand with a judgment, that passion never clouded, and a zeal that knew no abatement. No one would go farther to serve a friend; while no one more quietly discharged the duty of charity, or disbursed alms, with less ostentation, or more religiously regarded the golden precept of not letting the left hand know, what the right hand did.

To crown all, he was a devout, meek, christian churchman. His piety was unusually serene. A firm believer in the guardianship of an especial Providence, he was as meek in adversity, as he was modest in prosperity. The saddest sorrow, that ever cast its shadow over his heart, only served to bring out more distinctly the beauty of his christian faith, and illustrate the moral bravery, that sustained him, when in the fiery furnace. It is not for me to lift the veil, that curtained a domestic life, as beautiful as eye ever rested on, save only to say to you, that it was there his moral loveliness shone out most gloriously. As a husband, father, brother, friend, he was a model of excellence. It was the *uniformity* of his tenderness, that never faltered, or for a moment passed under eclipse, which gave it its crowning charm. The habits of his life were exceedingly simple and uniform. Society had its attraction, but it was the society of the learned, moral, and refined. Cheerful, he shed a genial sunshine all around him. Never exuberant in spirit, he was never depressed. He took the most philosophical view of life. His great theory was, that no man was essential to society. He believed that the man for the place would never be wanting; and consequently in his extraordinary humility, he never valued himself on account either of his attainments or native powers. I have not a doubt, that

much of his sublime composure was attributable to this wise theory. In one of his last letters to me, which breathes all a woman's tenderness, writing of what he thought must be a source of pleasure to me in the retrospect, he expressed the hope, that, notwithstanding the little he had accomplished, he had not lived altogether in vain, so far as duty to home and family was concerned — though even in this, he took but little credit to himself. And yet, if ever any one lived for a purpose high and noble, and lived up to the purpose, he did. He realized that God sitteth above the water floods, King forever; and this filled him with contentment in the lot assigned him.

His death was fully as sublime as his life. When I said to him, that I hoped he would be spared to the church, and permitted to finish the great work he was engaged in, he said so calmly, and with so much meek submission, there is a grander and vaster field beyond us. Though he sometimes indulged in curious speculations, he never permitted a doubt of the truth of the catholic creeds to cross his mind, but laid his vast stores of learning at the foot of the cross, and saw only in that cross the perfection of truth, and recognized in science only the handmaid of faith. And now, that I stand before you to-night, his earliest friend, in the light of forty years' experience of the heart-wealth and mental power of his well-spent life; will you chide me for laying this humble garland on his honored bier?

I appreciate the beautiful in others. I revere the learning and eloquence which have marked their pilgrimage. I admire the flowers of faith, hope and love that have left the scent and freshness of their bloom and rich flowering behind them. I would not detract one iota from their claim on our gratitude and praise.

But I must be allowed to say, that so rare a combination of wealth of mind and wealth of heart, it has not been my privilege to behold in another. His works will live after him, a monument of his industry, vast capabilities, and devotion to the progress of science and literature — more solid and enduring than chiselled marble, or wrought gold, they will enshrine and embalm his memory. Who will take up his unfinished work, and complete it, as he began it? I know not the man. Maryland is rich in historic names. Frederick and Baltimore are both justly distinguished — your own society has stars in it, which will mingle their glory with the stars that have faded. I am to-night in presence of those whom I would praise, if they were not now living to subdue me into silence. Eloquence is hers, such as I think neither Greece nor Rome have excelled. Legal learning, combined with legal logic, is hers, such as never before adorned the courts of judicature. In history, and literature, and science, she has achieved much, through her gifted sons, in the years that are past. Her name still lives, and the lustre of her surviving stars keeps undimmed the noble galaxy, that has faded in the dawning of a brighter day. But she has given birth to another, who, without eloquence, or the skill of the rhetorician, or rather without the theatre for their display, will transmit her name to the ages following, one in a century, whose varied and diversified genius was equal to any duty that could have been assigned to it.

Some of her most honored names live now but in the echoes of the past; and those echoes are so marvellous, that many have deemed them but the creations of a distempered imagination. It may be that much of the brilliancy of the orb that has just set, is

destined to live only in a faint reflection; since much that he did not live to finish, must perish. But still we will swell the echo of his fame, and claim, as ours, a star of the first magnitude in the firmament of science, literature and theology, and assign to it the position it merits in the constellation. Enough survives to rescue this eulogy from the charge of extravagance, and to demonstrate that exaggerated panegyric is not possible where the mental and moral fruits are so abundant. I little thought that mine would be the duty of strowing a few flowers over his grave, and gathering up the lights and shades of a character that lent so much of sunshine to my own. But for your too indulgent kindness, the presumption of attempting a task so much above my ability, would never have been laid to my charge. I have labored to perform the duty truthfully and impartially, as I honestly believe. I am not conscious that I have, in any one point, drawn upon my imagination, or sacrificed historic accuracy to the weakness of private friendship.

It would be expecting and asking too much, to dream for a moment, that you, whose study in history, and habits of wise and discriminating criticism, compel you to regard with caution the estimate, which private friendship is prompted to place upon the moral and intellectual qualities of another, will endorse all that I have felt it my duty to say in honor of the deceased. But of this I feel confident. You will judge me by my facts, and not condemn the truth of the eulogy bestowed, as far as those facts sustain it; while you will acknowledge, that a most wonderful genius has passed from among us. "Memor et amans" is the motto, you will inscribe on his grave; and while history and biography remain to bless the world with their reflected lights, you will never forget

a brother, who shared your counsels and deliberations, and has bequeathed to you a good name, unsullied by a vice — a name which is still fragrant with the memories of a kindliness of heart, and truthfulness, that can never fade away. If he had lived to accomplish nothing greater, his learning sanctified by piety, his weaving of science around the cross, with a simplicity so childlike, would entitle him to your lasting gratitude, and secure him a place in your most honored list of names. For the combination is not more beautiful, than it is rare.

It only remains that, I say a word on his personal appearance, and habits of life. Tall, finely formed, erect, and easy in motion, he was a man to be observed. Exceedingly neat and precise in his dress, he never appeared but with the air and bearing of a gentleman. His precision may have occasionally reached the point of stiffness, and to a degree impaired the effect of his personal presence. He was scrupulously observant of the etiquette, that regulates the intercourse of gentlemen. Free in his converse with his friends, he was never familiar.

His library, which was remarkable both for the number and value of its volumes, was the embodiment of taste in arrangement, and neatness of detail; while the desk, at which he wrote, was always in the most perfect order. Even the currency he circulated gave evidence of his refinement. He always kept a new issue by him, and never having occasion to demand change, he never had occasion to use the soiled exchange of the market. Regular in all his habits, he lived by rule, and never departed from the rule laid down. He mingled but little in general society, spent his evenings for the most part at home, and gave certain fixed hours to the loved ones

there. He sat up late. It was in those quiet hours of the night, that he accumulated his vast stores of learning. He ate moderately, but always seemed to relish what he ate. Never idle, he was always at leisure. I was never denied his presence, and never felt, that my visit was an intrusion. His pen, or book was laid aside instantly, while he greeted me with the most winning gracefulness; and then we bounded o'er the sea of friendship, as gaily, as though no work had been laid aside. Never in a hurry, he lost not a moment. He occasionally relaxed his overtaxed energies by a game of chess, which he played well; and in earlier years he sought relief in music, in which he was well skilled. He drew finely, although I believe, he never indulged in colors. He was but fifty-four, when he died. His bodily frame was full of vigor to the last, never enfeebled by disease, and never abused by excesses of any sort.

His life, though one of intense activity, was for the most part spent in retirement; and to that is attributable the fact, that but comparatively few knew, who he was, or what he was. But to the world of science he was well known, and to the more prominent statesmen of the country. The coast surveys were submitted to his inspection, and all disputed questions of geography were referred to him for settlement. On the questions of coinage, which have of late exercised many of the European governments, he was probably the best informed man in the country. I regret that I have not accurate information as to the actual service he rendered in this particular department of science. All that I know, is, that he went abroad, and was brought into close contact with the masters of the mint in England. The triumphs of his genius were signally displayed before the com-

mittee on foreign relations, on the fractional currency. They sent for him to explain it to them, avowing their ignorance of it, and their impression, that it was of little practical importance. Without preparation, he gave them an extended and lucid exposition; and soon convinced them, that it was of vital concernment to the commercial interests of the country. He was consulted by the Secretary of the Treasury, on the finances, and was about to be placed at the head of the mint, in Philadelphia, when death closed his career. When the Hon. Wm. B. Reed was about to go out, as Commissioner, to China, Dr. Alexander sent him the most elaborate and exact explanation of the weights, and measures, and coinage of China, which that gentleman found to be of the greatest possible benefit, in the discharge of his duties, as commissioner.

Had not Dr. Alexander's modesty and love of retirement operated to keep him for the most part in private life, he would have been called to fill offices of high public trust, where his admirable talents and systematic industry would have produced the happiest results, and won for him the respect and confidence, which his presence at the coast survey and the national treasury never failed to inspire. I have often regretted that the public service so seldom enjoyed the wisdom of his counsels and the benefits of his systematized labors. And yet, on his own account, I never regretted the privacy of his life; because it kept him fresh and pure, equally free from the tricks of the politician, and the fawning that so often follows upon the patronage of office. His purity was a jewel too precious to be imperilled by the pomp of power, or the pride of station.

In the opening of this brief and imperfect sketch, I said to you, in all frankness and sincerity, that no one could more deeply regret that this duty had not devolved on one of your own number; for this society are not wanting in all the requisites that make up the skilful delineator of character, in discrimination, patience of investigation, and the power of expression. You have already placed the state and the country under obligation, by your contributions to literature. I do well, therefore, to regret that one of your own fraternity had not been detailed for the duty. You, however, willed otherwise, and I have laid on the altar of friendship this unpretending tribute to the memory of the deceased. It bears the impress of haste, which nothing could atone for but the honest plea that I had no more time, as I had not the ability, to make it more worthy of the occasion. In the words of Pliny, writing of one whose death he deplored, I can say, "what a friend have I lost!" I lament his death on my own account, even more than yours; for I have "lost a witness of my life, a guide, a master."

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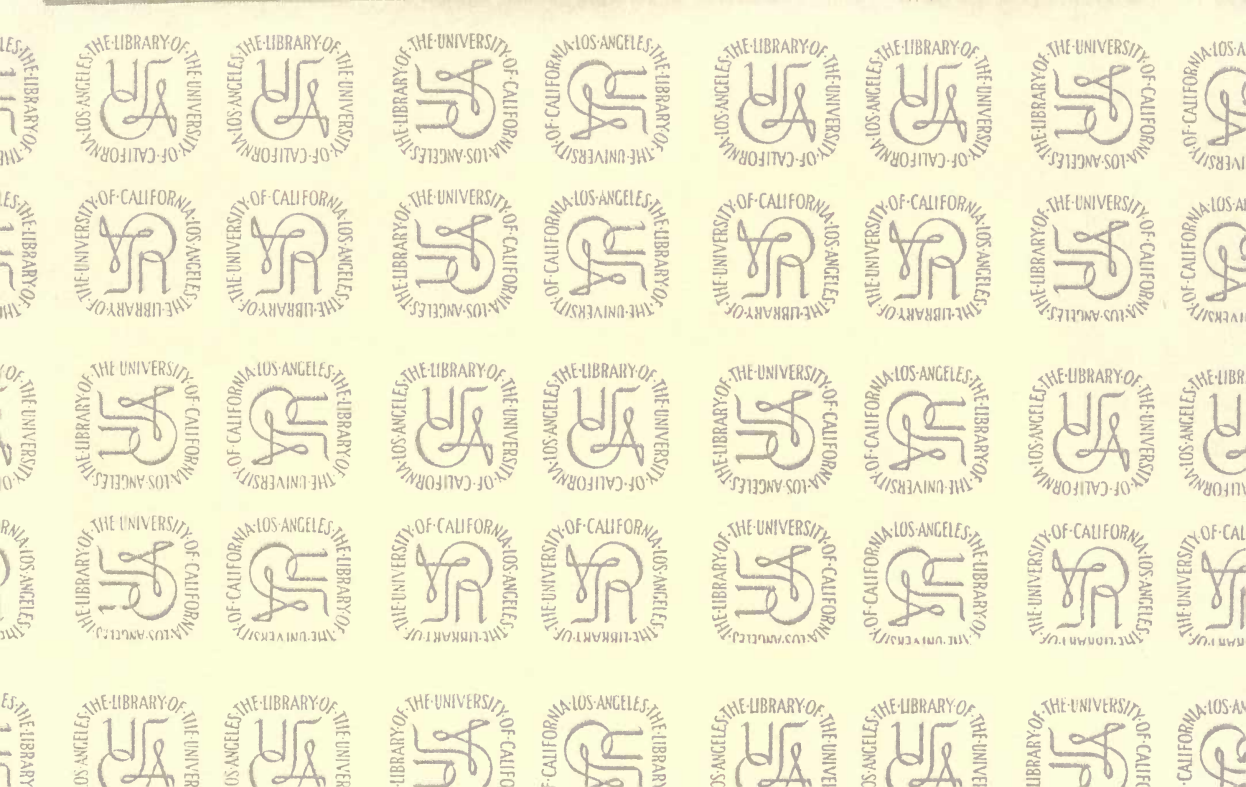
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